



Feb 27

## A New Texas Has Heart Like This

*sara ross*

*Disclaimer: I have not involved myself in any campaigning for Student Government elections, and have had no official affiliation with any pair running for student body president and vice president prior to this interview. The purpose of this article was and continues to be spotlighting Guneez Ibrahim, Hannah McMorris, and their team on a more personal level before election day. However, after meeting with Guneez and two heads of her campaign, I can confidently say that I have experienced firsthand just how passionate the candidates are about human rights, education, and the needs of each and every member of the University of Texas community, no matter their background. Together, the two women bring a fresh perspective and commitment to diversity that is unique to their platform, and have an unbelievable potential for leadership. Members of each campaign are extremely qualified, and no matter who is victorious, students can be certain that the future of their campus is in good hands. However, I challenge you to open your mind, revisit Guneez and Hannah's campaign points on their website, and imagine that a new Texas can look like this.*

While a suspicious lack of Speedway tablers would suggest that the whirlwind of Student Government elections is winding down, Guneez Ibrahim and Hannah McMorris' campaign for Student Body President and Vice President hasn't stopped rolling as the university approaches election day. Their team was easy to spot gathered around a small table in the Liberal Arts commons. If not for the "Guneez & Hannah" flashing across their crisp white shirts in bright, retro letters, I still could have picked them out by the comfortable chatter over sprawled laptops and phone screens that greeted me as I sat down. Meetings with student

organizations are the order of the day, and as the evening closes, an abbreviated team of three sits before me ready to present their vision for “A New Texas.”

Running a campaign on the Forty Acres is not a small undertaking, but presidential candidate Guneez Ibrahim, a sociology and design fourth year from Louisiana, is no stranger to throwing herself into things full-force. When President Trump defunded the landmark Obama-era program “Let Girls Learn” in the summer of 2017, Ibrahim focused her energy and decided that she didn’t want to feel powerless anymore. After selling hundreds of t-shirts screen-printed in her apartment with former first lady Michelle Obama’s face (and a lot of help from a few generous benefactors), Ibrahim was able to donate \$25,000 to girls’ education. But the momentum of that project kept building.

“I was still riding that high, and a bit naïve,” she tells me, laughing. “I didn’t want it to end. So I looked up countries that had benefited from ‘Let Girls Learn,’ and I booked the cheapest plane ticket I could find. I left a week later.” Ibrahim soon found herself teaching at a girls’ orphanage in Peru for sexually abused teenage mothers and their babies, an experience that had no small impact on her current view of womanhood, education, and what it means to serve.

Taking that same energy to the election, Ibrahim and McMorris seek more than anything to create space for underrepresented voices on campus. Whether this means a new campus center for students who commute from Riverside, gender-inclusive signage in campus bathrooms, or creating identity-based positions in Student Government, serving marginalized and tokenized populations has become a vital part of Guneez and Hannah’s platform.

Despite their own personal accomplishments in public service, Student Government, and journalism, Ibrahim and McMorris have still had an uphill battle to fight as the first women of color ticket in the history of the university’s Student Government elections. Surprisingly unfazed, Ibrahim tells me how she was laughed out of an organization meeting that same day. “We aren’t just doing this for the sake of representation. But if there’s one thing I’ve taken away from all the slander we’ve received for identity-based politics,” Ibrahim tells me, “it’s that representation is absolutely a reason to do something.”

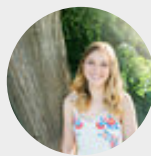
If Guneez and Hannah’s campaign were to have one main goal, it’s emphasizing the idea that benefitting one community benefits all. This is particularly true when trying to disrupt what the team’s Communications Director, Langston Dillard, calls the rather bureaucratic and stale culture of Student Government. This desire to push for others and affect change is what makes Guneez and Hannah such a powerful pair. “If you love something, you want it to improve. Hannah loves UT and isn’t afraid to be critical of it when needed. That’s why we work so well,” says Ibrahim of her running mate.

However, when asked what one thing they would want the university to know about the women who could potentially be the next heads of the student body, it wasn't their extensive list of accomplishments in service or organizations like Texas Spirits, Orange Jackets, Student Government, and Orange Magazine that Guneez and Hannah's team cited. Beaming, campaign manager Julia O'Hanlon spoke proudly of Ibrahim's heart and balance. "She has the ability to simultaneously be so caring and loving while also being an intensely passionate badass. Guneez and Hannah will fight for UT, every last student here, no matter who you are."

"The first word that comes to mind is 'humanity,'" the Communications Director for Guneez and Hannah's campaign, Langston Dillard, told me. "Guneez is so down-to-earth, and will take the same authenticity to every angle of an issue." After spending only a short time with the candidate and her team, we covered everything from Vines to access to halal and kosher food in dorms to her volunteer work in Peru. When you watch Ibrahim lean in and see her eyes light up with passion for her work as she discusses human rights and education, it's clear that Guneez and Hannah's vision for a new Texas is fresh and full of heart. Says Ibrahim, "There's a reason this campaign has been groundbreaking. There have been struggles, but someone has to pave the way."

### *Interviews*

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